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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENTIANE 000640

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS (BESTIC)
PACOM ALSO FOR FPA (MCADEN)

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TAGS: [LA](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: "LIKE-MINDED" DIPLOMATIC GROUP DISCUSSES HMONG
SITUATION

REF: A. VIENTIANE 0453

[1](#)B. VIENTIANE 0288

[1](#)C. VIENTIANE 0110

Classified By: Ambassador Ravic Huso for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: A recent meeting of the "like-minded" diplomatic group revealed a strong consensus in support of coordinated pressure on the Lao to improve conditions for the Hmong ethnic minority and to provide greater access to returnees and Hmong areas. The situations of the 5 boys from the group of 26 Hmong children, the 150 being held in Nong Khai, the group of 8000 in Petchabun, repatriated Hmong from Thailand, and others being internally resettled all elicited concern from the group. The like-minded also reviewed the limited information available on the upsurge in security activity in Bokeo Province. End summary.

Overall Situation

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador and Pol/Econ Chief attended an August 1 meeting of the "like-minded" diplomatic group hosted by German Ambassador Weinand with representatives from the German, Australian, French, and Swedish Embassies as well as from the EU delegation, UNDP, and UNICEF. Participants discussed the security situation in Laos with a specific focus on several Hmong issues. Ambassador Weinand credited the Government of Laos (GOL) for reports that a number of political prisoners had been released as part of the GOL's annual amnesty announcement in December. The EU delegation is contacting MFA to verify the names of those released.

[1](#)3. (C) The group discussed the increased reports of activity by the Lao security forces (including in Bokeo Province where as many as 100 people may have been arrested) apparently linked to the Hmong resistance/insurgency. One report circulating among the diplomats indicates the GOL may have a list with the names of 200 people wanted in Bokeo Province by the security forces. Foreigners in Bokeo have been warned not to travel on certain roads on certain days to avoid security activity. The Swedish Charge d'Affaires also noted reports about recent clashes in the former Saysomboun Special Zone (most of which has been reincorporated into Vientiane Province).

Hmong Issues

¶4. (C) Although the GOL has "found" the 21 Hmong girls who had been part of the 26 missing children group (actually detained by the GOL in December 2005 and held until April 2007), the fate of the five boys as well as the adult woman who had been detained with the 26 children remains unclear. The German Ambassador noted reports that 18 of the 21 girls -- who had been sent back to live with relatives in villages in different parts of Laos in April -- have now fled to Thailand. Apparently 13 have returned to the Huay Nam Khao holding camp in Thailand's Petchabun Province where their parents are located.

¶5. (C) The group discussed the deteriorating conditions at the Immigrant Detention Center in Nong Khai Thailand where a group of 150 Hmong have been held since November 2006. All are UNHCR-designated and referred to several third countries for resettlement, but that process is on hold. In response to escape attempts from the Center in June, the remaining 150 have been in "lock down" for the past five weeks in the Center's two small holding cells. Conditions are reportedly very difficult. The like-minded discussed reports that the Lao and Thai would be willing to send all 150 to a single recipient country or that the GOL would allow the individuals involved to emigrate without conditions if the entire group were to first return to Laos. The "like-minded" agreed that it would be worthwhile to work with counterpart Embassies in Bangkok, including especially those Embassies of countries designated as resettlement locations, to try to find a solution for this group.

¶6. (C) The "like-minded" noted that Thailand repatriated 31 Hmong to Laos at the end of May and another group of 160 in early June. No further repatriations have been reported.

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Although the GOL policy is generally to return repatriated Hmong to their original home villages, the GOL is said to be constructing two new villages for those who cannot be returned to their earlier home villages -- in Punglak near Kasi, in north-central Vientiane Province, and in Houay Pakmak in Muang Maet District in western Vientiane Province. Although MFA had organized tours in February and March for members of the diplomatic corps to meet earlier repatriated Hmong, MFA had not yet done this for these more recent repatriated groups. The like-minded agreed it would be important to press MFA to keep its promise to do so.

¶7. (C) The "like-minded" expressed concern about statements by a Thai general July 22 that all 8,000 refugees in the Hmong holding camp in Petchabun Province would be returned to Laos en masse in the next few months. There are reports that the GOL is constructing a transit camp large enough to hold temporarily -- or perhaps for a longer term -- as many as 6,000 persons. This may be for the Petchabun returnees or for people internally resettled or even for residents displaced by dam construction and other development projects. The EU representative mentioned that he had recently discussed with the Foreign Minister and Vice Foreign Minister the issue of EU assistance for resettlement villages. The Lao officials appeared interested and suggested working-level discussions to follow up. GOL acceptance of donor assistance could allow some access to these groups for monitoring.

¶8. (C) In October and November 2006, large groups of "remote people" -- generally family members from groups still involved in the insurgency -- surrendered to the GOL. Their fate is generally unknown, although a French NGO, the ICRC via the Lao Red Cross, and the WFP have apparently been able to periodically assist some of these people.

Next Steps

¶9. (C) In addition to specific agreement to coordinate with Bangkok Embassy counterparts (para 5 above) and to press MFA for access to repatriated groups (para 6), the "like-minded"

agreed to coordinate talking points to be used in discussion with GOL officials. These points would be used on a regular basis with GOL contacts and focus on improved treatment of and access to both repatriated Hmong from Thailand as well as resettled "remote people." Offers of assistance, where possible, should be continued as a way to gain access to these groups.

Comment

¶10. (C) One issue that continues to divide us and our Australian colleagues from the others in the "like-minded" group, is the willingness of the EU and German representatives and several others to see visits by the diplomatic corps to meet with repatriated Hmong as an important tool. We view the two diplomatic corps visits earlier this year (refs B and C) as important steps in getting MFA used to the concept of outside monitoring. However, visits by diplomats are insufficient alternatives to broad scale and professional monitoring of the multiple Hmong groups facing difficulties. We have strongly suggested that an independent organization, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), should be allowed to undertake the level of monitoring that we see as required in Laos. The GOL continues to resist this type of international monitoring.
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